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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5973
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2016

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN FM OFFERS SUPPORT TO LEBANESE GOVERNMENT

REF: BEIRUT 03757

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In a move calculated to show support for the Siniora government, Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdelilah al-Khatib visited Beirut on December 4. He met twice with Prime Minister Siniora, as well as with Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, former President Amin Gemayel (father of recently assassinated minister Pierre Gemayel), and Ministers Marwan Hamadeh, Ghazi al-Aridi, and Nayla Mouawad. FM Khatib delivered a letter to PM Siniora from King Abdullah conveying Jordan's concern for Lebanon's plight. Khatib pointedly did not call on President Lahoud.

¶2. (C) During a December 6 meeting back in Amman, Khatib told Ambassador that he found PM Siniora calm and resolute, determined to stick to constitutional procedures rather than be moved by street demonstrations. Khatib said he appealed to Berri's ego, noting that the Arab world looked to him for leadership in resolving Lebanon's crisis. Berri maintained that he did not want the Siniora government to collapse, and asked Khatib to pass on that reassurance.

¶3. (C) As is their nature, Khatib's interlocutors tried to draw Khatib into the specifics of the negotiations on a "blocking minority" in the cabinet, as well as deals on the Hariri tribunal, Paris III, the fate of Lahoud, and a new electoral districting law. While fascinated by the details, Khatib claimed to have held himself aloof. He also rebuffed one dangerous proposal from Berri to join an Arab mediation committee composed of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Khatib saw this as a transparent effort to bring Syria in "through the back door."

¶4. (C) Amin Gemayel described his conversation with Hassan Nasrallah along the same lines provided to Ambassador Feltman (reftel), emphasizing Nasrallah's negative, even dismissive views of the Syrian leadership. Following his meeting with Siniora, Khatib offered strong, unqualified support for Siniora's government, telling media that Jordan "pledges support to all Lebanese people and Lebanese constitutional institutions," and calls for "activating all constitutional channels and institutions to find a way out of the problem."

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